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UNCLAS KINSHASA 001502

SIPDIS

FOR CA/VO/F/P

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: CONGO-KINSHASA BUSINESS VISA FACILITATION PROGRAM

REF: 04 STATE 166108

1. Summary. A low level of trade between the United States and Congo-Kinshasa, a short average NIV appointment wait time and open channels between the consular and economic sections form the basis of informal mechanisms used at post to facilitate business visa issuance. Legitimate business travelers face little to no impediments obtaining visas by following standard procedures. Per reftel, post will reach out to local American businesses with interests in Congo-Kinshasa to solicit feedback on current mechanisms and to explore ways to further facilitate legitimate business travel to the United States. End summary.

2. Years of civil war and mismanagement have left Congo-Kinshasa one of the poorest countries in the world despite its abundance of natural resources. Trade between Congo-Kinshasa and the United States is comparatively small -- approximately US 119 million, most of which is from the petroleum sector. Principal American companies with interests here include Chevron-Texaco, General Motors, Ford and Caterpillar. Manufacturers of cellular telecommunications equipment are potential sources of business with the United States, while American sellers of used aircraft sometimes have need for Congolese business visitors.

3. NIV workload in Kinshasa is approximately 3,200 applicants per year and appointment wait time averages three to five days. Legitimate business travelers with proper documents and a history of prior travel receive full and timely attention for visa requests. In instances where an unknown or poorly documented person is applying for a visa for business travel to the United States, the U.S. firm often contacts the consular section either directly or through the economic section to confirm the legitimacy of the proposed trip. With high levels of NIV fraud and a high refusal rate, vice consul prefers to individually examine any questionable applications or new travelers.

4. Based on these factors, post's standard visa appointment procedures and informal verification mechanisms for business travel have well served the American business community here. There are no lengthy delays for prospective travelers to obtain a visa interview, and cooperation between the consular and economic sections on identifying legitimate business travel is good.

5. Per reftel, post will look at formalizing and expanding these mechanisms by inquiring with local representatives of American companies about additional measure to facilitate business visas. Embassy-sponsored business roundtables will be ideal forums to gather such feedback. Post will invite interested companies to submit names and contact information of staff that consular personnel could contact in order to verify the bona fides of prospective travelers and the legitimacy of the travel agenda. Other pertinent information such as the names and passport numbers of any regular travelers also could be included in these post-maintained files.

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